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ABSTRACT

The role of communication in John Dewey's major philosophical themes is investigated in this paper. A description of Dewey's concept of the ideal communication setting is provided, emphasizing how individual and social personalities are developed according to vital, interactive processes. This is followed by a discussion of possible impediments to communication, including two broad types of influences (sociological and ideological) that Dewey specified as disrupting the ideal communication process. The final section of the paper is a description of how Dewey believed society might be "reconstructed"--by consciously applying the principles involved in the ideal communication process to specific social problems. (Author/RL)

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COMMUNICATION AND PROGRESS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF JOHN DEWEY

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In order to understand the role of communication as a social process in Dewey's philosophical thought, it is important to first realize that for Dewey, philosophy itself is a social, not a strictly academic, enterprise. As David Marcell notes, Dewey believed that "an individual's ideas and actions were intrinsically part of a dynamic sociohistorical process, and thus philosophy itself was a social activity."[1] For Dewey, philosophy was valid only insofar as it sought to improve the human condition, and the knowledge one needed to direct such an undertaking could only be obtained through a recognition and investigation of the social quality of human nature. Thus, as Marcell goes on to say, "human minds, individually and collectively, functioned to improve man's relationship to his natural and social environment; there could be no absolute separation between individual acts and social effects. As a result, the idea of progress constituted the warp and woof of Dewey's interpretation of the history of philosophy. . . ."[2] These two tenets -- a belief in the fundamentally social nature of human experience, and the conviction that a melioristic social order could be effected only through intelligently directed collective action -- form the substructure of Dewey's philosophical outlook.

Communication, as the agency which molds human nature in a communal setting, is a primary element of the system. It is the action in which "something is literally made common in at least two different centers of behavior."[3] Therefore, it both presupposes and effects human community. No communication would be possible in an association of men where meanings

are not shared; yet communication is also the medium through which new meanings enter into human consciousness and become part of the general community of meaning. Just as it is impossible to conceive of something as having human significance outside of human community, it is similarly impossible to assign meaning to any wholly isolated sign or symbol in the process of communication: "no sound, mark, product of art, is a word or part of language in isolation. Any word or phrase has the meaning which it has only as a constellation of related meanings. Words as representatives are part of an inclusive code."[4] Therefore, a sign or symbol only acquires meaning when "its use establishes a genuine community of action."[5]

Thus, language for Dewey is more than simply a way to express things that have human meaning. Although this is the popular characterization of the nature of language, it implies that meaning has an existence prior to its being verbalized in language. In this view, language is simply a process in which meanings are exchanged, much as money might be exchanged. For Dewey, language has a generative power, in an ontological sense. Things and events enter into the realm of human significance as they are made a part of language:

> it is language, originating as a medium of communication in order to bring about deliberate cooperation and competition in conjoint activities, that has conferred upon existential things their signifying or evidential power.[6]

One is reminded of Bishop Berkeley's immaterialism, which held that objects have no existence until they have become the objects of perception. For Dewey, physical reality may have an existence apart from human association (although he does not address this problem), but it has no human significance

until it has become a part of language. Dewey uses the phrase "concretion in discourse"[7] to denote the ontological recognition language confers upon existential reality.

Since language both requires and produces a community of shared meanings, and human significance cannot exist in isolation, the creation of the individual self can only be traced to social forces. "Individuality" for Dewey has meaning only in a purely biological sense -- to the extent that each of us inhabits a separate physical body, we are "individuals."[8] In all other ways, we reflect the shaping influence of social interaction, or communication. Thus, "individuality is not originally given but is created under the influences of associated life."[9] Just as a single word is endowed with meaning by its place in the general lexicon, so does an individual achieve a sense of selfhood by interaction with others in the human community: "except in and through communication of experience from and to others, he [the individual] remains dumb, merely sentient, a brute animal. Only in association with fellows does he become a conscious centre of experience."[10]

The defining quality of Dewey's concept of communication as embodied in his thoughts on language and personality is the principle of interaction. As such, communication is both a transactional and formative process, in which meanings are not only shared but generated; and through which personality is not merely enhanced but created. The culmination of the principle of communication as interaction, in which the concept of the generative power of language joins with the notion of the social genesis of the self, is in the phenomenon which Cooley labeled the "looking-glass self." Although Dewey does not employ this specific term to denote this process, he clearly has the same thing in mind when he says that symbolic, interactive communi-

cation "compels one individual to take the standpoint of other individuals and to see and inquire from a standpoint that is not strictly personal but is common to them as participants or 'parties' in a conjoint undertaking."[11]

In addition to its more abstract potential for initiating and the sustaining the various interactive processes thus described, communication also has a number of special qualities of tremendous cultural significance when it takes the form of symbolic language. Dewey specifies two as having particular importance. First of all, symbols are much less cumbersome than things to deal with, and are thus a tremendous practical convenience. In this respect, language is an economical way of dealing with experience:

> Where communication exists, things in acquiring meaning thereby acquire representatives, surrogates, signs and implicates, which are infinitely more amenable to management, more permanent and more accommodating, than events in their first estate.[12]

The use of symbols provides a way of denoting an object, event, or process without the necessity of the referent being physically present, in either space or time. In other words, language is both a symbolic citation of experience, and a record of experience. By giving something of human significance a name and making it part of language, we extract it from the exigencies of space and the transience of time, and place it in a realm where it may be easily recovered for future consideration:

> Immediacy as such is transient to the point of evanescence, and its flux has to be fixed by some easily recoverable and recurrent act within the control of the organism, like gesture and spoken words, before things can be intentionally utilized. . . . Only language, or some form of artificial signs, serves to register the relationship and make it fruitful in other contexts of

particular existence.[13]

This "greater capacity of symbols for manipulation is of practical importance. But," Dewey adds, "it pales in comparison with the fact that symbols introduce into inquiry a dimension different from that of existence."[14] This added dimension of experience made possible through the use of symbolic language is the potential of language for producing logical relationships of its own accord, without the necessity of reference to existential reality at all. Thus language is more than simply a shorthand version of reality -- it provides a medium through which secondary relationships among events and objects may be recognized and recorded. Thus:

> when phases of the process are represented by signs, a new medium is interposed. As symbols are related to one another, the important relations of a course of events are recorded and are preserved as meanings. Recollection and foresight are possible; the new medium facilitates calculation, planning, and a new kind of action which intervenes in what happens to direct its course in the interest of what is foreseen and desired.[15]

Elsewhere, Dewey describes the process in somewhat more picturesque terms. The use of symbolic language, he says, makes it possible for us to "bring together logical universals in discourse, where they copulate and breed new meanings."[16]

This ability of symbolic language to register and record abstract relationships as well as events and objects is tremendously important in the formation and transmission of culture, and is a necessary condition for social improvement. Because man "preserves his past experiences" in symbolic language, "he lives not, like the beasts in the field, in a world of merely physical things but in a world of signs and symbols."[17]

Thus symbols do not merely facilitate thinking, they "control sentiment and thought."[18] As such, they form the basis for man's cultural interactions with his fellows. Symbols denoting relationships which are significant and enduring are preserved and transmitted, making it possible for civilizations to develop: "The works in which meanings have received objective expression endure. They become part of the environment, and interaction with this phase of the environment is the axis of continuity in the life of a civilization."[19] Thus, culture for Dewey is nothing more -- or less -- than a record of relationships of human significance, created, registered, and transmitted through the medium of symbolic language.

That the record of these relations is cumulative, and that each may serve as an element in the elaboration of future relations, is the fundamental assumption of Dewey's notion of progress. As things and events are signified in language,

> They become capable of survey, contemplation, and ideal or logical elaboration; when something can be said of qualities they are purveyors of instruction. Learning and teaching come into being, and there is no event which may not yield information.[20]

The extent to which a culture develops and improves itself is contingent on the degree to which it avails itself of the melioristic possibilities inherent in symbolic language. A culture develops new meanings to the extent to which it is able to create new symbols to register these meanings and thus make them available for transmission.

Dewey's description of the communication enterprise as an interactive process is presented in his writings as an ideal construction. As the

ideal effects of communication -- intrapersonal empathic understanding, a strong sense of community, and a capacity for intelligent social planning and prediction -- have not obtained in modern America, he looks for possible breakdowns in the communicative processes for the source of these problems. Consistent with his emphasis on the formative and generative powers of symbolic communication, Dewey attributes the basic problem to a shortage of the symbols necessary for dealing with the massive social reorganization the United States has undergone as a result of rapid technological development. Although the new technology has meant that "We have the physical tools of communication as never before," Dewey concludes that "the new age has no symbols consonant with its activities. . . . . Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is not possible."[21] Hence, the processes of individual and social growth, which depend wholly on successful symbolic communication, are retarded or blocked.

The shortage of adequate symbols, though, is itself a symptom of the difficulty and not its direct cause, since under ideal communication conditions, symbols and experience develop in parallel fashion. Dewey discusses two larger human problems which have blocked the development of forms of symbolic communication needed for dealing with changing social reality. These may be broadly specified as sociological and ideological problems.

The sociological impediment to ideal communication concerns the peculiar characteristics of the mass society in America and the technological factors which have produced it. Under ideal conditions, successful symbolic communication and hence the instigation of interactive processes are not hindered by perceptual difficulties: if the symbol is presented,

it is assumed that it will be accurately perceived. However, the increased complexity of social organization in a mass society means that perception becomes problematic. In a mass society, man's local environment is directed and in some degree determined by invisible forces. Improved communication and transportation facilities have meant that government, as well as industrial production and agricultural processing, are carried out in large cities, to realize economies of scale from the employment of the techniques of mass production. However, this type of social organization also short-circuits the process of communication-as-interaction. Modern technology has not produced a means by which the indirect consequences produced by a mass society may be symbolically transmitted and perceived in a way which allows complete interaction among communicators. Without a symbolic mechanism to foster the perception of indirect consequences, communication, hence interaction, hence individual and social development, are arrested:

> Men feel that they are caught in the sweep of forces too vast to understand or master. Thought is brought to a standstill and action paralyzed. Even the specialist finds it difficult to trace the chain of 'cause and effect'; and even he operates only after the event, looking backward, while meantime social activities have moved on to effect a new state of affairs.[22]

"Communication" in the simple sense of physical exchange of information may still take place in such a society, but it does not carry out the interactive, integrative functions Dewey ascribes to ideal communication:

> We hear speech, but it is almost as if we were listening to a babel of tongues. Meaning and value do not come home to us.

> There is in such cases no communication and none of the result of community of experience that issues only when language in its full import breaks down isolation and external contact.[23]

Thus one class of impediments to ideal communication may be described as sociological and technological in origin. In addition, Dewey cites a number of blockages that may be termed philosophical or ideological. While these are more subtle, in the end they prove even more stubborn to resolve than the particular problems communication encounters in a mass society. In fact, Dewey devotes a very large part of his philosophical writings to investigating, exposing, and attempting to overcome these problems. For Dewey, these ideological misconceptions have a common source in the unfortunate propensity for dualistic thought in man. Dualistic thinking can take a number of forms, all of which are fundamentally injurious to the communicative process. Most of these are derived in some way from the philosophical dualism which separates the real and the ideal, or the existential and the essential aspects of human experience. First given precise formulation by Plato, this distinction forms the metaphysical substructure for most forms of religious as well as philosophical thought, both eastern and western.

It is not the idealist stance of the dualistic mode of thought which Dewey found distasteful. After all, he was himself an idealist in that he recognized the power of abstract thought to form logical relations without direct reference to existential reality. Furthermore, he saw that this process of abstract thought was the most efficient instrument of social improvement, in that it made possible the development of ideal social goals. However, Dewey felt that traditional dualistic thought erred by carrying the process of abstraction too far and endowing it with an undue, exclusive

sort of significance. By placing ideal reality in a realm beyond the reach of human communication, it subverts the process of interaction: "Failure to acknowledge the presence and operation of natural interaction in the form of communication creates the gulf between existence and essence, and that gulf is factitious and gratuitous." [24] This separation of the ideal and the real into discrete categories thus effectively blocks social progress, since it nullifies the possibility of interactive development of a viable social ideal on the human level.

Therefore, traditional dualism emphasizes isolation rather than connectivity; ideal reality as fixed product rather than experiential reality as dynamic process. For Dewey, such ontological isolation is based on a totally irrational premise:

> For the mad, the insane thing to us is that which is torn from the common context and which stands alone and isolated, as anything must which occurs in a[n ideal] world totally different from ours. Without an indeterminate and undetermined setting, the material of any experience is incoherent. [25]

The philosophical schism between essence and existence, though false, nevertheless has tremendous ideological potency, and according to Dewey has given birth to any number of related dualisms in almost all aspects of human experience. Dewey recalls how, as a youth, he had to struggle to overcome the influence of the New England culture he was born into, a culture structured around this dualism, which set up "division by way of isolation of self from the world, of soul from body, of nature from God . . . ." [26] Such ideas "brought a painful oppression — or rather, they were an inward laceration" to Dewey's sense, as yet unarticulated, that the natural state

of human life was integration and organization, not isolation.

A subtle version of philosophical dualism exists in social thought, in the concept of atomic individualism -- the notion that the individual is self-sufficient, possessed of inherent natural rights, and therefore enters into association with other men on a strictly voluntary basis. For Dewey, this attitude accounts for the "subjectivistic, solipsistic and egotistic strain in modern thought."[27] Such a system of thought fails to recognize that the self is created by interaction with other human personalities:

> The idea of a natural individual in his isolation possessed of full-fledged wants, or energies to be expended according to his own volition, and of a ready-made faculty of foresight and prudent calculation, is as much a fiction in psychology as the doctrine of the individual in possession of antecedent political rights is one in politics.[28]

When the individual is conceived as autonomous, communication no longer performs its natural interactive function; rather it is seen as "a mechanical go-between to convey observations and ideas that have prior and independent existence. Speech is thus regarded as a practical convenience but not of fundamental intellectual significance."[29]

The isolation of the individual implicit in the concept of the self as possessed of "natural" rights leads to the creation of a similarly isolated and self-sufficient national state. The state achieves a false autonomy by touting its"exclusive national sovereignty."[30] Although the state is made up of individuals, it is traditionally not seen as a community based on communicative interaction, but as a separate and isolated institution. Thus, an unfortunate social dualism -- analogous to the philosophical dualism between existence and essence -- is created, between the individual and

the corporate body of the state. As with the earlier dualism, the consequence is the nullification of communication, making social and personal stagnation virtually inevitable. There can be no communication and hence no possibility for progress between two such isolated and opposing entities, even though the isolation is artificial and voluntarily imposed. Dewey considers this unfortunate:

> The habit of opposing the corporate and collective to the individual tends to the persistent continuation of confusion and uncertainty. It distracts attention from the crucial issue: How shall the individual refind himself in an unprecedentedly new social situation, and what qualities will the new individual exhibit?[31]

Social amelioration is impossible under such circumstances: "progress will not be initiated until we cease opposing the socially corporate to the individual."[32]

Although the concept of dualism as it is demonstrated in the social realm is most cogent to a discussion of Dewey's thoughts on communication, a similar vision informs his views on other philosophical concerns as well. In each instance, traditional dualism is made manifest in the creation of ontologically discrete categories of existence, resulting in an isolation which is foreign to the natural interactive character of dynamic existence. By de-emphasizing the necessity of interaction, such isolation arrests the process of communication and hence the potential for progress, in whatever realm of human endeavor it comes to characterise. In artistic effort, for example, dualistic isolation takes the form of elevating the esthetic experience out of the world of existential experience and into a transcendant realm of "Pure Beauty." In contrast to this prevailing view of art, Dewey's theory of

art, like his theory of the self, centered on its social and experiential genesis. Art is not the result of transcendant inspiration, but of interaction -- communication -- with the social, natural, and biological environment. Thus art can serve a social as well as esthetic function. In fact, for Dewey, the quality of the esthetic experience induced by art is contingent on the socially expressive quality of the work of art. The whole esthetic experience is invalidated, and the benefits of esthetic communication are nullified, when it is conceived as "something that occurs exclusively inside a self or mind or consciousness, something self-contained and sustaining only external relations to the objective scene in which it happens to be set."[33] The isolation of the esthetic experience from social reality reiterates the traditional dualism by violating the natural connection between the self and its environment. Opposition, rather than communication and interaction, comes to be the characteristic circumstance, and art loses its social potential as a symbol-developing medium when this occurs. It becomes merely a social ornament, with unfortunate consequences for both art and society: "As long as art is the beauty parlor of civilization, neither art nor civilization is secure. . . . The values that lead to production and intelligent enjoyment of art have to be incorporated into the system of social relationships."[34]

Dewey specifies a number of analogous dualisms in his writings, each characterized by the isolation of special qualities from the general arena of social interaction, thus blocking progress by arresting the ameliorative process of communication. For example, the mind may be hypostatized, resulting in a sort of intellectual dualism which pits "pure reason" or "pure intellect" against existential reality. When this occurs, mind is

conceived of as "an independent entity which attends, purposes, cares, notices, and remembers."[35] The result is an "isolation of thinking from confrontation with facts,"[36] which restates the traditional dualism, i.e., a "separation of the physical and the rational, the actual and the ideal."[37]

A sort of corporate dualism, related to the sociological impediments to communication discussed earlier, arises when special interest groups -- "immense and consolidated unions in action" -- are formed, "on an impersonal rather than a community basis."[38] Although the resultant dichotomy which is created between individual and corporation is on the social rather than the metaphysical scale, it is nonetheless a product of the dualistic habit of mind which tends to perceive the world in terms of fixed entities rather than as interactive processes.

The ideological considerations represented by the dualistic strain of traditional philosophical thought, in all its various metaphysical and sociological permutations, present at least as potent a threat to progressive, interactive communication as do the strictly sociological impediments posed by technological advance and the development of a mass society. Dewey repeatedly stresses that these ideological threats should not be underestimated. The "opposition that now exists between the spiritual and ideal elements of our historic heritage and the structure of physical nature that is disclosed by science" are dualistic formulations which "reflect a conflict that is everywhere active in modern civilization,"[39] blocking communication and therefore preventing ordered and intelligent progress. Yet merely specifying the problem in this way does not provide a way of combatting it. Dewey is tireless in his efforts to prove that the dualistic habit of mind is not a natural

way of perceiving reality. Far from being dictated by metaphysical necessity, the dualistic, non-interactive mode of perception is shown to be the product of social custom and human bias: "philosophy originated not out of intellectual material, but out of social and emotional material."[40] This technique of attacking dualism by tracing it to its social origins is the heart of Dewey's genetic approach to the history of philosophy, which he says is a "more effective way of undermining this type of philosophic theorizing than any attempt at logical refutation could be."[41]

In different works, Dewey applies the genetic method to each of the dualisms discussed above (and several others besides). While it would be impractical to fully document all of these arguments, a summary of Dewey's "genetic exposé" of philosophical dualism may serve as an illustration of the principle involved. By approaching the history of philosophy from the assumption that it evolved as an organized body of thought during specifiable social conditions and not as a slowly developing vision of Essential Truth, Dewey finds that the dualistic habit of thought was originally conceived of as a way of reinforcing existing social conditions. Rationality, or the intellectual mode of life, came to be associated with the aristocratic, leisure class in traditional societies; therefore, elevating intellect to the realm of essential reality had the effect of widening the social distance between this group and the mechanical, artisan class:

> The scheme of knowledge and nature became, without conscious intent, a mirror of a social order in which craftsmen, mechanics, artisans generally, held a low position in comparison with a leisure class. . . . The latter was exemplified only in the exercise of Pure Reason untainted by need for anything outside itself and hence independent of all operations of doing and making. The historic

> result was to give philosophic, even supposedly ontological, sanction to the cultural conditions which prevented the utilization of the immense potentialities for attainment of knowledge that were resident in the activities of the arts. . . .[42]

Academic philosophy thus became a propagandistic tool in the hands of the leisure class, and the elaborate metaphysical distinctions between real and ideal were in actuality nothing more than a rhetorical reinforcement of existing social conditions. "It became the work of philosophy to justify on rational grounds the spirit, though not the form, of accepted beliefs and traditional customs."[43] In other words, the association of "essential reality" with the intellectual, aristocratic class became a form of social power. This archaic distinction, however, has unfortunately lingered on into modern times, negating the process of communication and preventing the development of a viable social ideal based on interaction. The result is that "The term 'ideal' has been cheapened . . . by use in philosophic discourse for apologetic purposes to disguise discords and cruelties in existence."[44]

By using the genetic method to show that "philosophy [developed] not as an isolated thing but as a chapter in the development of a civilization and a culture,"[45] Dewey proved to his satisfaction that the distinctions which the various traditional dualisms had developed had no metaphysical authority, but were merely born out of the "prejudices[,] . . . class interest and bias"[46] of our ancestors. As one commentator has noted, this meant that, for Dewey at least, "the metaphysical backbone of the traditional dualisms was broken"[47] and the process of social reconstruction could begin.

The essential thrust of the reconstructive effort depends upon a renewed recognition of the central role which communication plays in man's individual and social development. However, merely recognizing this fact of existence is not enough; our minds have become too accustomed to thinking in dualistic terms to readily acknowledge that interaction, not isolation, is the natural character of human experience. Social progress therefore depends on a conscious application of the vital principle of the communication process -- progressive interaction -- to specific human problems. Language is essential to the effort. It serves as a metaphysical bridge linking the isolated aspects of the traditional dualisms: "there is a natural bridge that joins the gap between existence and essence; namely, communication, language, discourse."[48] Furthermore, this interactive principle must be consciously applied to all phases of man's total environment, not just the portion which involves his social relationships. When man enters into full interaction -- communication -- with his total environment, he no longer simply recognizes bare objects, but perceives the significance of things. Dewey describes the difference between recognition and perception in this way: "In recognition we fall back, as upon a stereotype, upon some previously formed scheme. ... Bare recognition is satisfied when a proper tag or label is attached . . . ."[49] Thus recognition isolates an event or object in a fixed structure of knowledge. In contrast, when perception occurs, "The past is carried into the present so as to expand and deepen the content of the latter."[50] Therefore, "To perceive is to acknowledge unattained possibilities; it is to refer the present to consequences, apparition to issue, and thereby to behave in deference to the connections of events. As an attitude, perception or awareness is predictive expectancy, wariness."[51]

The process of perception, by which Dewey means simply that the self enters into full communication or interaction with his total environment, has two consequences. First, the individual becomes an active participant in the reconstruction of reality. As opposed to traditional dualistic thought, where reality is ready-made and the best the individual may hope for is to sharpen his ability to see it, human life for Dewey is a process of constant adaptation, mutation, and growth, on both the part of the human organism and its environment: "The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way."[52] For the human half of the interactive equation, perception means an active effort is required; human resources must constantly be summoned up from within the organism: "The organism brings with it through its own structure, native and acquired, forces that play a part in the interaction."[53] Consequently, since this is an active, dynamic process, the environment is also subject to transformation: "In the interests of the maintenance of life there is transformation of some elements in the surrounding medium. The higher the form of life, the more important is the active reconstruction of the medium."[54]

Secondly, it means that knowledge, or the ability to intelligently determine what direction future reconstructive efforts will take, is always experientially derived. It is useful to think of the process of acquiring knowledge as an extension of the concept of the looking-glass self mentioned earlier. In the same manner by which an individual adjusts his personality by taking into account the responses of others in his social environment, so must he reconstruct his vision of reality on the basis of interaction and adaptation with his total environment. All knowledge is practical in the

sense that it is derived from experience, and useful to the degree in which it becomes a guide for directing future experience. Thus, "knowledge is a function of association and communication. . . ."[55] Dewey provides this description of the relationship between experience, communication, and knowledge:

> The world we have experienced becomes an integral part of the self that acts and is acted upon in further experience. In their physical occurrence, things and events experienced pass and are gone. But something of their meaning and value is retained as an integral part of the self. Through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also in-habit the world. It becomes a home and the home is part of our every experience.[56]

The capacity of symbolic discourse suggested earlier, to catch events of human significance from the flux of nature and fix them in a realm where they may be easily recovered, is an indispensable element in the task of reconstruction. As we communicate with the environment, symbolic discourse makes it possible for us to gain knowledge for changing it, as well as ourselves, in order to enact a more beneficial relationship between the two. This is the heart of Dewey's concept of reconstruction, and the motivating vision behind his belief in the possibility of progress. The older, dualistic notion of knowledge as fixed, determinate, and "essential" plays no part in the process: "Intelligence is not something possessed once for all."[57] Knowledge can never be simply cumulative; additional experiences will necessitate revision, adaptation, or disposal of present knowledge:

> For 'taking in' any vital experience is something more than placing something on top of consciousness over what was previously known. It involves reconstruction which may be painful.[58]

Communication is inextricably involved in the process of reconstruction, for "When communication occurs, all natural events are subject to reconsideration and revision."[59]

This process of reconstruction is most effectively induced by the application of the "scientific method," by which Dewey meant simply that one approached the process of adapting to one's environment with an experimental rather than an absolute outlook on knowledge and experience. He describes the "scientific outlook" this way:

> The scientific attitude is experimental as well as intrinsically communicative. If it were generally applied, it would liberate us from the heavy burden imposed by dogmas and external standards. Experimental method is something other than the use of blowpipes, retorts, and reagents. It is the foe of every belief that permits habit and wont to dominate invention and discovery, and ready-made system to override verifiable fact. Constant revision is the work of experimental inquiry. By revision of knowledge and ideas, power to effect transformation is given us.[60]

The key to Dewey's outlook in this respect is contained in a short essay which contains his intellectual autobiography, significantly titled "From Absolutism to Experimentalism." In that essay, he stresses that abolishing absolutism does not necessitate the abolition of idealism. Rather, a commitment to the experimental method of science demands a new idealism, in which experimental knowledge serves as the foundation for the formulation of dynamic social ideals, designed to answer specific human needs, rather than the fixed "idealism based on the metaphysics of a classic antiquity."[61]

The process of reconstruction, enacted by communication and directed

by a dynamic social ideal, is the ideological basis of Dewey's meliorist stance. In his writings, Dewey offers several examples of how the reconstructive process may operate to transform various aspects of existence, which we now think of in terms of the traditional dualisms, into a vital social dynamic. These areas include art, politics, morality, education, sociology, and cultural theory. Despite the apparent diversity of these facets of existence, all are open to the melioristic effects of the reconstructive effort. The manner in which Dewey outlines the reconstructive possibilities for redefining the relationship between the individual and society may serve as a paradigm of the method. As previously noted, Dewey believed this relationship was traditionally characterized in terms of a social dualism, in which a belief in the inherent natural rights of the individual isolated the self, and the doctrine of exclusive national sovereignty isolated the state. The effect was a nullification of interaction, communication, and therefore progress. By bringing to bear Dewey's concepts of communication as formative interaction, the artificiality of dualistic thought as revealed by the genetic method, and the possibilities for progressive reconstruction of experience which characterizes the experimental method, the traditional social dualism is transformed into a community of integrative participation. The effect is to release untapped melioristic potential in both the individual and society:

> The solution of the crisis in culture is identical with the recovery of composed, effective and creative individuality. . . . When the patterns that form individuality of thought and desire are in line with actuating social forces, that individuality will be released for creative effort. . . .The positive and constructive energy of individuals, as manifested in the remaking and redirection of social forces and condi-

> tions, is itself a social necessity. A new culture expressing the possibilities immanent in a machine and material civilization will release whatever is distinctive and potentially creative in individuals, and individuals thus freed will be the constant makers of a continuously new society.[62]

Dewey's only direct discussion of communication as a social process takes place in those works directly concerned with an elaboration of his social philosophy. However, his recognition of the special characteristics of symbolic discourse, his emphasis on the importance of recognizing that interaction is the formative process in the creation of both the individual and society, and his melioristic outlook based on a belief that the intelligent reconstruction of experiential knowledge makes possible the enactment as well as the creation of new social ideals, all relate in fundamental ways to his theory of communication. The central dependence of his entire philosophic outlook on the potential of communication to effect social change is evident in the way he begins an essay with this statement: "Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful."[63] The process of communication to create a participatory community of feeling and thus direct intelligent social action is so awesome in Dewey's mind that he considered it to be the defining characteristic of animate human life: "The planets in a constellation would form a community if they were aware of the connections of the activities of each with those of the others and could use this knowledge to direct behavior."[64]

Dewey credits his study of Jamesian psychology with awakening him "to the importance of distinctive social categories, especially communication and participation" in the work of philosophy. Awareness of this

importance led him to "conviction that a great deal of our philosophizing needs to be done over again from this point of view."[65] Clearly, Dewey viewed his own efforts as one step in the process of reconstruction, that of doing our philosophizing over again from the standpoint of communication.

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